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In My Opinion

The Professional Airman in International Negotiations: What Role? What Preparation?

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The compleat negotiator should have quick mind but unlimited patience, know how to dissemble without being a liar, inspire trust without trusting others, be modest but assertive, charm others without succumbing to their charm, and possess plenty of money and a beautiful wife while remaining indifferent to all temptation of riches and women.

Manual on Diplomacy, published during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

ONE must speculate that candidates for such a compleat negotiator will be hard to find within the U.S. Air Force officer or noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps, even if "plenty of money and a beautiful wife" were eliminated from the list of required qualifications. Today, as in previous eras, a good man is hard to find. Perhaps it is fitting that instead of trying to find a good man, or throwing the nearest reasonably qualified person into the breach, that the U.S. Air Force get down to the practical matter of educating a cadre of negotiators—a distinguished and skillful group from which individuals can be summoned as the requirement arises.

Not a day passes without our taking part in some form of negotiation. Today you may have negotiated with your compatriots over so simple a matter as who would buy the coffee. You may have negotiated a contract to paint the command post, or you may have worked out the wages and fringes of a labor contract with a local union. You may have been party to negotiations over conflicting requirements for limited office space among wing organizations. At a higher level, you may have negotiated major contracts with an aerospace corporation for weapons or services. Negotiations at some level are an inextricable part of the daily work of a military officer or NCO.

In negotiations at the highest plane, we might have seen you as a party to bargaining with the future of the nation at stake, as in the Paris talks of the 1970s which were conducted to achieve the cessation of hostilities in Southeast Asia. Or you might have been involved in the Geneva negotiations aimed at curbing the escalation of long-range or theater nuclear weaponry through arms control treaties. Then, too, you might have been in the Middle East working on the agreement for withdrawal of foreign military forces from Lebanon.

The role of military personnel in such high-level negotiations is often obscured by the fact that the leading participants are State Department officials or special envoys wearing mufti. Nevertheless, military personnel, if they can be seen at all, are at the "right hand" of the official representatives, providing valuable support. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, other military participants are engaged in indispensable staff work, researching technological details, analyzing military implications, setting up logistical and force dispositions, and preparing position papers

for the protagonists. In certain instances, as at Geneva in the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START), military figures are the principals. U.S. Army Lieutenant General Edward L. Rowny is such a protagonist, although he now has ambassadorial rank and has doffed his uniform.

From what well of experience do we select our U.S. military representatives and staff personnel for crucial politico-military negotiations? Does the Air Force have a pool of personnel prepared to participate in or finalize arms export agreements, siting of electronic surveillance outposts, insurgency resolutions, truce parleys, armistice talks, arms control meetings, and peace treaty conferences? Where does that reservoir exist of the requisite experienced persons with a keen knowledge of history and geography, perspicacity, military expertise, and razor-sharp intelligence? Not only must the military pick the face-to-face "point men," but it must gather a cadre of staff assistants with specialized hardware and tactical skills together with impeccable linguistic abilities both in using military terminology and in interpreting the rhetoric used by the opposition in negotiations. Have such experts been pre-identified? Are they selected on an ad hoc basis? Does the U.S. Air Force contribute its share? Specific data are hard to come by, but here is one example.

Admiral C. Turner Joy, chief of the United Nations Command delegation to the Korean Armistice Conference, was supported by a team of staff officers described by him as directly connected with the negotiations.[1] That team consisted of thirty-six Army, Navy (Marine), and Air Force officers. Of these, the Air Force supplied eight. Admittedly, these eight included some starring, across-the-table performers, such as USAF Major General L. C. Craigie, Brigadier General W. P. Nuckols, Colonel D. O. Darrow, and Colonel Andrew J. Kinney. However, the USAF contribution was disproportionately small compared to the numbers of Army and Navy members. To what factors can this skewed representation be attributed? Is it possible that the reservoir of competence within the Air Force for such negotiations was too limited to assign a balanced representation?

There is, of course, a counterargument to preparing such personnel. Since this high-level kind of negotiation occurs perhaps once every generation, it would be uneconomical to prepare specialists for such a seldom-needed requirement. However, this rationale ignores the fact that negotiations are an inseparable part of everyday life in the military. Negotiations of lesser importance are taking place regularly all over the world, involving not only departments, agencies, and private sectors of the United States but also the Soviets, Warsaw Pact nations and client states, our many allies, and a myriad of nonaligned Third World nations. A prime example is the seemingly endless negotiation of issues relating to the complicated situation in the Middle East.

Should not the United States (and the U.S. Air Force, in particular) be represented by the best-trained negotiators available? Could not the Air Force lead the way in the creation of a mechanism for preparing a skilled pool of negotiators? Is it not possible that the Air Force might well become the service to which others might turn to prepare their military bargainers? Could the Air Force provide superbly trained technicians who are ready to face up to the stiffest competitors and, for example, negotiate complex internal issues successfully, retain advantages hard-won on the battlefield, or bring home agreements on arms control that achieve U.S. politico-military objectives? The considered answer seems to be yes.

Negotiations with foreign nations, particularly the Soviets, are often conducted under extremely arduous, sometimes bizarre circumstances and worrisome handicaps. Consider this report examining the negotiation proceedings that resulted in the interim agreement on strategic arms known as SALT I.

Most Americans assume that the two sides begin negotiations by exchanging data on the weapons to be limited. This is not the case. For the last ten years [prior to 1978] we have reported on our missiles as well as our best estimates of Soviet Forces without receiving any information in return. In fact, according to Fred Ikle, a participant in the negotiations as Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency under Presidents Nixon and Ford: "After we tell the Russians the ... characteristics of those weapons of theirs that would be limited, they refuse to confirm or deny the data—even though the data form a critical part of the agreement being negotiated."[2]

Today's negotiations in Geneva most certainly entail similar mind-bending handicaps differing only in character and dimension.

What is so different in negotiating with the Soviets? Fred C. Ikle, who has been associated with arms control negotiations for many years, testified before the Senate Committee on National Security:

Many American officials ably expound the urgency of discovering and cultivating *common interests* in negotiations with Communist powers and of *healing the fissures* of conflict. This is all to the good. Yet, successful long-term bargaining requires not only flexibility but also perseverance, not only conciliation but also counteroffensive, not only understanding for the opponent's fears but also understanding of his bad sides.... the world is not so kind to us that we are likely to succeed where we lack the will to win.[3]

Thus, to be a successful negotiator, according to this seasoned veteran, requires knowledge of your own strengths and weaknesses; a depth of understanding of your "opponent's fears," as well as his "bad sides"; an altogether comprehensive grasp of your opponent's history, society, economy, military strengths and weaknesses, and current concerns; and awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals who face you as representatives of that opponent.

Admiral Joy relates that during the Korean War armistice negotiations, he learned some special bargaining techniques from the North Koreans and Chinese. In his book, *How Communists Negotiate,* he labels and gives some examples of these techniques.[4] Most of the labels he ascribes are descriptive of the tactic that the other side's negotiators used: e.g., Stage Setting, Loaded Agenda, Roadblocks, Veto, Red Herrings, Inches into Miles, Welshers, and Wearying Tactics. These were the bargaining tools that the North Koreans and the Chinese employed to frustrate the Americans, who, they knew, typically like to take on a job and finish it as soon as possible. This American penchant for "getting on with it" is widely known. It can lead our negotiators into traps unless they are aware of those pitfalls and analyze critically each move or proposal of our opponents. Unlike most Communist negotiators, we in the West (particularly we Americans) tend to view negotiations as a conciliatory process. Witness our American heritage of "horse

trading" in the marketplace and our modern history of "good-faith collective bargaining" between employers and workers.

In contrast, history tells us, the Communist aim in negotiations is to carry on the "struggle" to achieve the triumph of Marxism-Leninism, not specifically to solve the issue at hand. The Communists proceed in negotiations so as to achieve at the bargaining table what they may have failed to achieve on the battlefield or by other means. They use what we would call "tricks." One such gambit is the Stage Setting, as Admiral Joy labels it.[5] A striking example of this tactic, he relates, concerned the United Nations Command's offer to the North Koreans to negotiate a cease-fire aboard a neutral Danish hospital ship in Wonsan Harbor away from the battle zone. The North Korean response was, "If *you* desire a truce, come to Kaesong and we will talk." The reply was phrased as though no specifics had been proposed by the United Nations Command. The North Koreans ignored the reality that the talks were at the instigation of Soviet Ambassador Malik, who had let it be known that the North Koreans were ready for a negotiated settlement because they were severely hurting from attacks by U.N. forces. Ignored, too, was the U.N. offer that neutral ground be the site of discussions in order to eliminate partisan influences on the bargaining. Instead, the North Koreans pointedly picked the village of Kaesong—*within* their battle lines and *exactly* on Latitude 38 precisely for propaganda purposes.

General Matthew B. Ridgway, commander of the U.N. forces, accepted the location "in the interests of saving time and showing sincere intentions." Doing so was a tactical error, as it turned out. Colonel Kinney arrived at Kaesong with several other officers, unarmed, as befits any peace delegation, and riding in vehicles bearing white flags for safe conduct. Their mission was to set up the initial meetings. They were rudely surrounded by North Korean combat troops with submachine guns pointed at them. North Korean photographers and press had been summoned to take pictures of the United Nations Command representatives bearing white flags and under armed surveillance. They were prepared to report in their propaganda press and newsreels that the United Nations were suing for peace as the supplicants on the defeated side! The North Koreans had very artfully *set that stage* to their manifest advantage.

This example illustrates that to further negotiations to their advantage, Marxist-Leninist regimes may place propaganda high on their agendas. As a result, our negotiators must work under the handicaps created by propaganda barrages. Some Soviet propaganda thrusts are discernible in the 1980s, now designed to undermine the U.S. position vis-á-vis our European allies in theater nuclear missile reduction talks. Consider a recent example. The Honorable Paul H. Nitze, who served as the representative of the Secretary of Defense at the SALT negotiations from the spring of 1969 through June 1974 and who has led more recent arms negotiations in Geneva, tells how the Soviets used propaganda in a global effort to influence the outcome.

From the time of the initial SALT I negotiations, the Soviet Union has mounted a vigorous, multifaceted propaganda effort to persuade the world, including Americans, that the U.S.S.R. is uniquely devoted to peace, has been the initiator of every imaginative move toward peace, and is the threatened party surrounded by potential enemies who are plotting the encirclement of the Soviet Union. This campaign has consistently *depicted the United States as making excessive demands and refusing to make the necessary compromises for agreement*. [Emphasis added.] [6]

John Patrick Walsh, former U.S. Ambassador and former State Department Advisor to the Air University Commander, in discussing U.S. bargaining with the Soviets on nuclear arms reductions indicates that "negotiations with the Soviets are difficult under any circumstances" but that we encounter additional complications because "we operate in negotiations on different wavelengths . . . We take pride in concepts of principle, rationality, and fair play. These are extraneous concepts for them, secondary to the imperatives of perpetual struggle and the correlation of forces." Ambassador Walsh recalls former U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson's observation that

"the Soviets negotiate by *acts* rather than debate, offer, and counter offer. By their acts, they strive to create situations of objective reality which preempt or *preclude alteration,* i.e., to establish *areas of non-negotiability."* (Others have summarized the basic Soviet guideline even more succinctly: "What's ours is ours; what's yours is negotiable.") Ambassador Walsh summed up his views by stating:

To the extent that we acquiesce in this type of intransigence, we dilute our basic negotiating position. In effect we then lean toward negotiating *for them.* Unfortunately, "hang tough" is a slogan rather than an American principle [of negotiation].[7]

Today, books on the art of negotiation fill the market and achieve sales in the millions. One such volume has been translated into thirteen languages, and its author is firmly convinced that successful negotiating can be learned.[8] Negotiation institutes have been established in the nation to provide instruction in negotiation to U.S. government agencies, as well as to such prestigious corporations as General Electric Company, J. C. Penney Company, and General Motors Corporation. Such bellwether efforts in teaching negotiation could possibly be used by the U.S. Air Force's center for postgraduate education, the Air University. Although today's experts deal mainly in business negotiations of the West, there certainly is much in their books and institutes that offers potential benefits for the military services. Such proven foundations for the teaching of negotiation could well provide the seminal concepts around which the Air Force could build a specialized curriculum or perhaps its own institute committed to excellence in this field.

What constitutes competency for negotiations under all situations but especially at the highest levels affecting our nation and the international climate of tomorrow? Can such competency be defined or quantified? Certainly, partial answers to those questions already exist in the writings and teachings of experts on the subject. However, we need to examine our own house and determine where we in the Air Force stand now with respect to negotiating skills. Specifically, can the Air Force assume that all colonels and general officers are already skilled in the role of across-the-table negotiator by virtue of their current postgraduate preparation for staff and command duties? Are these officers uniformly ready to deal effectively with complex global issues and the convoluted reasoning and tangled gambits of Warsaw Pact bargainers? At a lower level, solely by virtue of their normal postgraduate officer or NCO education, can our squadron and field grade officers, along with our noncommissioned officers, be considered skilled as behind-the-scenes staff assistants adept at preparing negotiating positions, fall-back positions, and innovative approaches to further negotiations? Can we feel assured that the standard curricula of our senior staff colleges and NCO academies offer adequate preparation for a negotiator pool?

Might not the Air Force be better served if certain individuals (i.e., those with the special abilities, skills, and background identified as keys to successful negotiations) were honed in the art of negotiating by participating in special seminars, case studies, and practical exercises? Should not the art of negotiation be included as a specific part of the curricula of USAF staff colleges and academies?

Were such curricula changes effected, very beneficial outcomes could be visualized. For example, when the next parley comes up (as it surely will), the senior USAF officer could feel confident in advising the unified commander who will participate that especially well-qualified blue-suit personnel are standing by, already prepared to enter the bargaining room and perform with skill, endurance, and finesse. And if, in this instance, the adversaries across he green baize are from the Marxist-Leninist school of bargaining, the USAF negotiators will be unimpressed with that particular style and capable of punching through rhetorical fog, handling propaganda ploys with equanimity, and ultimately obtaining a favorable agreement.

In addition, the mundane daily negotiations that take place on our own air bases will receive the educated attention of senior NCOs and officers adept in the skills that are needed. To cite a few examples, the negotiation of a fair local labor pact, the efficient conclusion of local agreements for the purchase of goods and services, and the inescapable routine negotiations of an equitable apportionment of tasks, manpower, and facilities within the air base structure will receive competent professional attention yielding beneficial results. Although, ultimately, commanders decide, "This is how we'll do it," commonly leading up to those moments is a multilevel process in which many individuals and groups may be involved. The accumulation of facts, input of opinion, interplay of professional skills, and pressing of individual wills that take place during that preparatory process may all bear on the decisions that commanders make before they voice that crisp statement of intent. Skilled supervisors, leaders, and staff members educated to guide such everyday negotiations effectively, fairly, and with tranquillity thus may make significant contributions to the commonplace yet important task of managing routine Air Force activities well.

As a lecturer and the author of ten books on the subject of negotiation, Gerard I. Nierenberg earnestly advocates, "If you know that ... you will find yourself across the table from your negotiating opponents, how do you prepare for this face-to-face encounter? How can you foresee the strategy of the opposite side, and how can you prepare to cope with it?.... Do your homework!.... [Achieving] *successful results ... requires the most intensive type of short- and long-range preparation and training*."[9]

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Notes

1. C. Turner Joy, Admiral, USN (Ret), *How Communists Negotiate* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), chapter 1.

2. Constantine C. Menges, "Closing the Loopholes, SALT II: Truth or Consequences," *The New Leader,* 25 September 1978.

3. Fred Charles Ikle, "International Negotiation," Memorandum prepared at request of the Subcommittee on National Security and International Operations (pursuant to Senate Resolution 311, 91st Congress) of the Committee on Government Operations, U.S. Senate, GPO, 1970.

4. Joy, p. 1.

5. Ibid.

6. Paul H. Nitze, James E. Dougherty, and Francis K. Kane, *The Fateful Ends and Shades of SALT* (New York: Crane, Russak and Company, 1979), p. 41.

7. John Patrick Walsh, "Negotiating with Soviets No Easy Job," *Advertiser-Journal*, Montgomery, Alabama, 30 January 1983, p. 2B.

8. Gerard I. Nierenberg, *The Art of Negotiating* (New York: Hawthorn/Dutton, 1968).

9. Gerard I. Nierenberg, *Fundamentals of Negotiating* (New York: Hawthorn/Dutton, 1973), p. 47.

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